

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE - SPOTLIGHT SPECIES ACTION PLAN

Common Name: Attwater's prairie-chicken (APC)

Scientific Name: *Tympanuchus cupido attwateri*

Lead Region: 2

Lead Field Office: Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge (APCNWR)

Species Information:

Status: Endangered

Recovery Priority Number: 6

Recovery Plan: Draft Attwater's Prairie-Chicken Recovery Plan, May 2009

Most Recent 5-year Review: None completed; initiated on April 23, 2007 (72 FR 20134)

Other: Gulf Coast Prairies Safe Harbor Agreement, permit issued November 1995

Threats: Current threats affecting APCs include the loss of coastal prairie habitat, disease, predation, population fragmentation, genetics, husbandry issues in the captive setting, and poor brood survival in the wild. It is uncertain at this point how global climate change may be affecting the species. More detailed discussions in regards to threats affecting this grouse can be found in the draft APC Recovery Plan.

Target: The goal for the next five years for the APC is to maintain the species' status as stable or improving. Continuing to set the ground work to increase production in captivity and solving the issue of poor brood survival in the wild will help prevent extinction.

Measure: Maintaining current wild population size (75-90 birds) over the next five years will be used as the "measure," with an understanding that, just by the nature of the bird's biology (*r*-selected), population numbers fluctuate from year to year due to uncontrollable circumstances. Any increase in the population obviously would be beneficial.

Actions: At a minimum, the following recovery actions must be carried out. Actions address specific threats.

Threat: Loss of coastal prairie habitat (Factor A)

Recovery Action (Action #)	Responsible Partners ¹ (* = lead)	Estimated Costs (\$1,000)					
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Manage and initiate grazing on public lands to maintain clumped grass/forb structure (1.3.1)	FWS-NWRS*, TPWD, USDA-NRCS	300	50	50	50	50	500
Control brush and exotic plants on public lands	FWS-NWRS*, TPWD,	150	150	150	150	150	750

(1.3.2)	USDA-NRCS						
Conduct prescribed burning on public lands (1.3.3)	FWS-NWRS*, TPWD, USDA-NRCS	75	75	75	75	75	375
Restore formerly farmed fields to native grasses on public lands (1.3.7)	FWS-NWRS*,USDA-NRCS	150	150	150	150	150	750
Secure additional habitat by providing technical assistance, economic incentives, and regulatory incentives on private lands through the CPCI program (1.4.8)	FWS-NWRS, FWS-ES*, TNC, TPWD, USDA-NRCS, Private, SHRC&D, GLCI	750	750	750	750	750	3,750

Threat: Disease (Factor C)

Recovery Action (Action #)	Responsible Partners ¹ (* = lead)	Estimated Costs (\$1,000)					
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Aggressively manage diseases and other health issues (2.1.4) ²	FWS-APCNWR*,BFs	425	125	125	125	125	925
Conduct research to determine factors affecting captive breeding, such as REV (2.4.1) ²	FWS-APCNWR, TAMU, UofG, WUHS*	50	50	50	50	50	250

Threat: Predation (Factor C)

Recovery Action (Action #)	Responsible Partners ¹ (* = lead)	Estimated Costs (\$1,000)					
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Control exotic wildlife species on public lands (1.3.9)	FWS-NWRS*,TPWD, USDA-NRCS, USDA-WS	50	50	50	50	50	250

Threat: Population fragmentation (Factor A)

Recovery Action (Action #)	Responsible Partners ¹ (* = lead)	Estimated Costs (\$1,000)					
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Survey APC numbers annually (3.2)	FWS-APCNWR*, TNC, TPWD	5	5	8	10	10	38

Threat: Loss of genetic diversity (Factor E)

Recovery Action (Action #)	Responsible Partners ¹ (* = lead)	Estimated Costs (\$1,000)					
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Determine and continually monitor genetic health of the captive flock (2.2) ²	FWS-APCNWR*, STCP*, BFs	65	15	15	15	15	125

Threat: Husbandry issues in the captive setting (Factor E)

Recovery Action (Action #)	Responsible Partners ¹ (* = lead)	Estimated Costs (\$1,000)					
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Evaluate diet for chicks and adults to help address problems that may be arising from current diets (2.1.6) ²	FWS-APCNWR*, BFs, FWZ, SARC, STCP, MAZ	25	25	25	25	25	125
Increase production of birds through increased efficiency at current facilities and the addition/expansion of breeding facilities to allow for a capacity of 100 pairs, with no facility containing more than 25% of the captive flock population (2.3) ²	FWS-APCNWR*, BFs, SARC, NFWF	1,400	900	500	500	500	3,800

Threat: Poor brood survival (Factor E)

Threat: Poor brood survival in the wild Recovery Action (Action #)	Responsible Partners ¹ (* = lead)	Estimated Costs (\$1,000)					
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Maintain food plots to provide supplemental winter foods and brood habitat on public lands (1.3.5)	FWS-NWRS*	10	10	10	10	10	50
Conduct research to determine factors affecting wild brood survival (3.7.1) ²	FWS-APCNWR*, TNC, STCP, TAMU, UT, NFWF	60	60	60	60	60	300

¹ See Appendix 1 for list of acronyms

² Identified as a critical need by the APC Recovery Team

Role of other agencies: The role of other agencies, partners, organizations, and private landowners is critical to the recovery of the Attwater's prairie-chicken. Working in partnership with agencies and organizations such as Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Sam Houston Resource Conservation and Development (SHRC&D), Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI), and others brings a diversity of talent to the recovery effort, especially when working with private landowners. This is evident with the current Coastal Prairie Conservation Initiative (CPCI) (a prairie restoration/enhancement program for private landowners with cost-share and "safe harbor" incentives) where private landowner involvement is pivotal in maintaining and enhancing coastal prairie habitat. In a state where the vast majority of land is in private ownership, it is imperative that private landowners continue to be involved in this recovery process. The habitat improvement role of the above-named agencies and associated organizations must continue in order to meet APC recovery goals and objectives.

The knowledge and expertise of individuals associated with many of the APC breeding facilities is also crucial to the recovery of the Attwater's. Without their dedication and know-how, the APC recovery program would be in a much direr situation. These organizations realize the importance of their work and that the captive breeding effort is one of long term commitment.

Academic institutions (Texas A&M University, University of Georgia, Western University of Health Sciences, University of Texas) and private organizations (Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Sutton Avian Research Center) are instrumental in carrying out necessary research needed for the recovery of the Attwater's. Their continued involvement will ensure that limiting factors for the APC can be resolved, ultimately leading to species recovery.

Role of other ESA programs: Using a diverse array of Endangered Species Act (ESA) programs and other programs to reach recovery goals for the APC is essential. Currently, Habitat Conservation Plans (HCP), safe harbors, and habitat management agreements are being used for recovery of this imperiled grouse. Funding from these programs and others, both within and outside the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) (Preventing Extinction Proposals, Section 6 grants, Challenge Cost-share agreements, Private Stewardship Grants, State Landowner Incentive Program, etc.) have been used in the past and continue to be used to pursue APC recovery actions including coastal prairie habitat restoration, release of captive-bred APCs into the wild, captive breeding, and researching the cause of poor brood survival in the wild.

Role of other FWS programs: A spirit of cooperation among all FWS programs is necessary for a successful recovery program. For example, FWS Ecological Services offices, through the Partners Program, can better manage the Coastal Prairie Conservation Initiative program for the APC because they have landowner contacts and information. Furthermore, FWS Ecological Services offices have personnel to conduct Section 7 and environmental assessment reviews necessary to carry out many APC recovery actions. Assistance with consultations (i.e., pipeline project through prairie chicken habitat) also is appreciated. Refuges can provide equipment and personnel necessary to carry out restoration projects or prescribed burns on private lands to help further recovery goals. National wildlife refuges (NWRs) within the APC's historic range with coastal prairie should manage this habitat with APCs in mind using appropriate management tools such as prescribed fire, appropriate grazing, and control of invasive species. NWRs Realty personnel would be needed to transact land purchases when acquiring additional APC habitat. In

the event of a “take” situation involving the APC, the FWS Law Enforcement division would need to be involved to help with the investigation.

Additional funding analysis: The actions identified above are only a fraction of the total recovery actions identified to recover the Attwater’s prairie-chicken. If additional funds are provided, the following recovery actions would start to help attain this Action Plan’s 5-year measure more quickly. Establishing self-sustaining wild APC populations is key in the eventual recovery of this species.

Recovery Action (Action #)	Responsible Partners ¹ (* = lead)	Estimated Costs (\$1,000)					
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Create a network of coastal prairie habitats containing multiple core areas (1.1)	FWS-ES*, FWS-APCNWR*, TNC, USDA-NRCS, TPWD, Private, SHRC&D, GLCI	750	750	750	750	750	3,750
Acquire at least 20,000 acres adjacent to APC NWR through a combination of fee simple and long-term easements from willing sellers (1.4.1)	FWS-APCNWR*, FWS-REALTY, TNC	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	10,000
Complete husbandry manual to standardize husbandry techniques and strategies (2.1.7)	FWS-APCNWR*, BFs	10	2	2	2	2	18

¹ See Appendix 1 for list of acronyms

The first draft Spotlight Species Action Plan for the Attwater’s prairie-chicken was forwarded to Ecological Services personnel at the Corpus Christi and Clear Lake field offices and all APC Recovery Team members for review. Comments and suggestions were incorporated as appropriate.


Field Supervisor

8/5/09
Date

APPENDIX 1. LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BFs	APC Captive Breeding Facilities (includes Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, Houston Zoo, Inc., San Antonio Zoo, Abilene Zoo, Caldwell Zoo, Sea World of Texas)
FWS-APCNWR	U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)
FWS-ES	U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Ecological Services
FWS-NWRS	U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service – National Wildlife Refuge System (Includes Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR, Aransas Refuge Complex, Texas Chenier Plain Refuge Complex, and Texas Mid-Coast Refuge Complex)
FWS-REALTY	U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Realty
FWZ	Fort Worth Zoo
MAZ	Mazuri Feeds
NFWF	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Private	Private landowners
TAMU	Texas A&M University
SARC	Sutton Avian Research Center
STCP	Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus
UofG	University of Georgia
USDA- NRCS	U. S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service
USDA-WS	U. S. Department of Agriculture – Wildlife Services
UT	University of Texas
WUHS	Western University of Health Sciences